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ITALY: Nationwide police raids against extreme rightist groups were probably intended to quell recent criticism from the left over the government's earlier failure to move more forcefully against the right.

Interior Minister Restivo, in statements to the parliament on 18 March, explained that the 32 police searches conducted during the past week were the result of investigations begun in December on alleged coup plans of an extreme right extraparlimentary group. According to Restivo, documents were uncovered which constituted "criminal intent." Restivo, whose actions were supported by the coalition partners in the government, promised a prompt and thorough investigation of the matter.

The organization involved in the alleged December plot was the National Front headed by neo-Fascist prince Junio Borghese. Borghese, who is being sought by the police, has been involved in such plots in the past, but has never been taken seriously by responsible officials.

The political motivation of the present investigation is underscored by the fact that the searches were carried out by the Ministry of the Interior without prior coordination either with the SID or the Carabinieri. Moreover, the government--which had been aware of the alleged coup planning since early December and which knew that it constituted no serious threat--made its move only after it appeared that the left might exploit the government's seeming inaction.

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The embassy believes the government may now find it necessary to balance its activity by moving against extraparlimentary elements on the left. Such an action would partially offset any move by the Italian Communist Party to use the plotting to forge "anti-Fascist unity" within the left. Moreover, a move against extreme leftists might help stem any criticism from officials

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